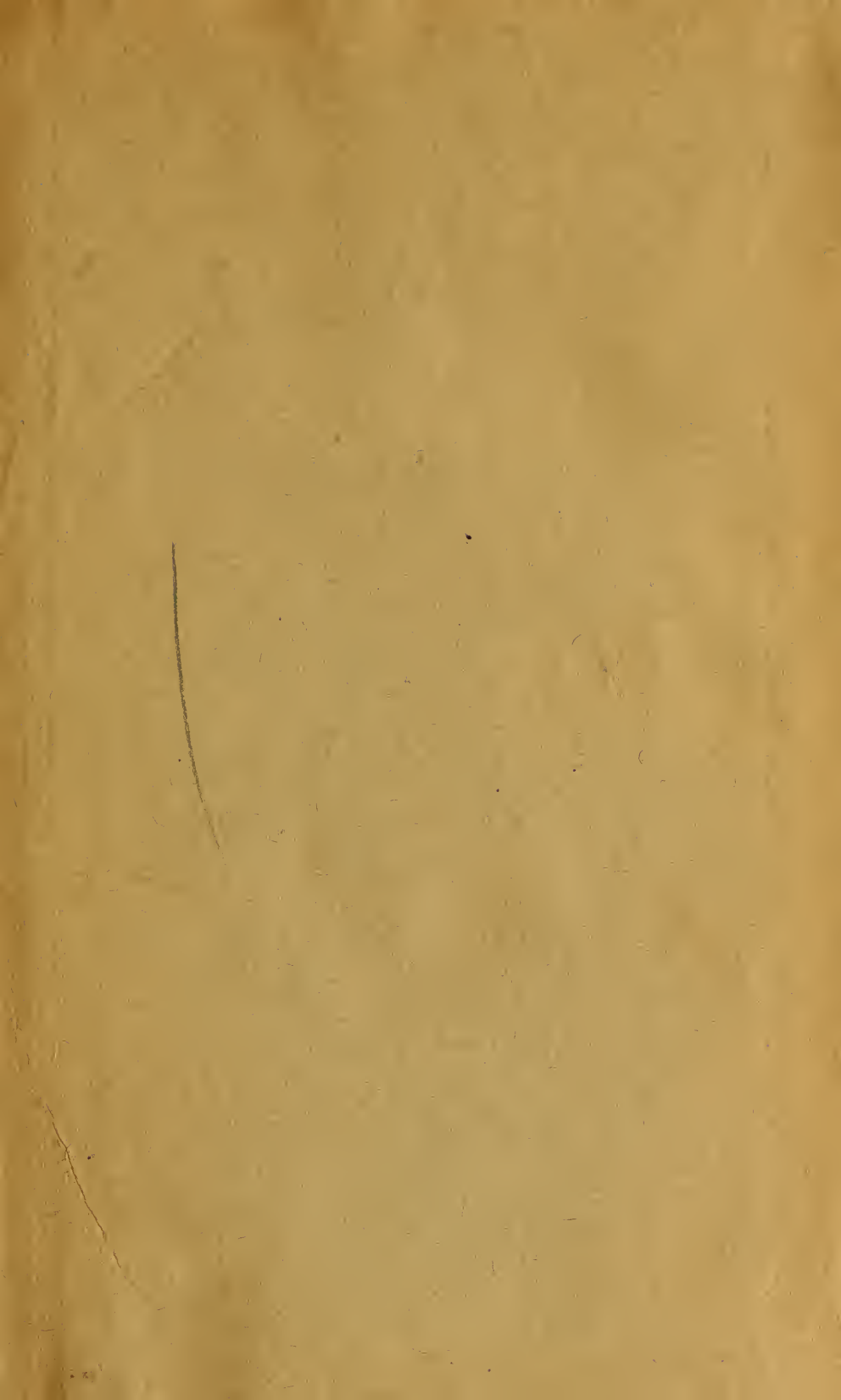


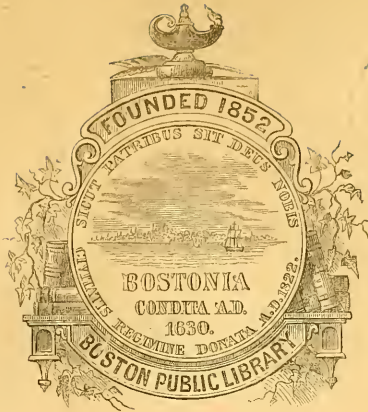


★  
No. 4414.8









K. 132

PAMPHLETS.

*Historical Addresses.*

\* Vol. 11. 8

1195





Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2011 with funding from  
Boston Public Library





THE

STUDY OF HISTORY

COMMENDED TO THE

ACTIVE CLASSES OF SOCIETY:

A LECTURE DELIVERED BEFORE THE

BATH MECHANIC ASSOCIATION.

DECEMBER 4th, 1838.

BY REV. RAY PALMER.

—————  
BATH:  
PRINTED BY E. CLARKE.  
1839.  
c

BATH, DEC. 5th, 1838.

DEAR SIR:

The undersigned, having been appointed by the Bath Mechanic Association, to wait on you with the request, that you would furnish for publication, a copy of the Lecture, delivered before the Association on the evening of the 4th, would respectfully solicit your compliance with that request, at such time as your engagements will permit.

Very Respectfully,

your Ob't Servants,

REV; R. PALMER.

ELISHA CLARKE. }  
NATH'L WALKER. } Com.  
DAVID INGALLS. }

---

BATH, DEC. 17th, 1838.

GENTLEMEN:

The Lecture delivered before the Mechanic Association, of which you have requested a copy, was as you are already aware, delivered unwritten, and from very imperfect notes. In compliance with your request, I have written it out as faithfully as my recollection enabled me to do, under the pressure of various cares and duties. On some points, I fear it may be less full and satisfactory, than when delivered; on others a few additional remarks are introduced. Such as it is, it is placed at your disposal, with the hope that it may be of some trifling service, to a class of my fellow citizens, to whose improvement I would gladly contribute to the extent of my ability.

I am Gentlemen,

Messrs. ELISHA CLARKE.  
NATH'L WALKER.  
DAVID INGALLS.

Respectfully and truly Yours,

RAY PALMER.

Committee of Association.

## LECTURE .

---

THOUGH I appear before you, Ladies and Gentlemen, under the influence of partial indisposition, it is with pleasure that I make the necessary effort, from the good will I bear to the Association, which, especially, I have the honor to address. Such Associations, are among the distinguishing characteristics of our age; and we can hardly fail, while assembled here this evening, to be forcibly reminded of the contrast, between the condition of the popular mind at the present day, and more particularly under the beneficent influence of our own free institutions, and its condition in past ages. Among the most favored states of refined antiquity, the treasures of knowledge, were the treasures of the few. It was only the philosopher, the statesman, the orator, the historian, and the poet;—the comparatively limited number who were professionally learned,—that ever aspired to look into the mysteries of science or of morals, and to obtain the peculiar pleasures of intellectual cultivation. During the eclipse of mind in the Middle Ages, the privileges of Knowledge were still more circumscribed; its fountains were then open, only in the seclusion of the Monastery, while the world without, if it thirsted, thirsted but in vain. And it was some considerable time, even after the revival of letters, before the treasures of learning began to be thrown abroad upon the great surface of society. It was the general introduction of the art of printing, and the general resurrection of the human mind from its long and melancholy sleep, which originated the disseminating process, and gave it the impulse, which has caused it to go forward with success. It has now reached a stage, at which the face of society assumes beneath its influence, a new and delightful aspect. The stores of wisdom which are open to the scholar, are made extensively accessible to all classes. Science has become the handmaid of the arts, and letters the means of popular

improvement; and the philosopher in his abstrusest studies, feels it to be his duty, to have an eye to the welfare of the world.

But while the active portions of society, are thus furnished with the means of personal improvement; while a thirst has been excited for an acquaintance with the results of scientific study and with the productions of cultivated mind, there is one branch of general knowledge, which seems to me, to have received far less attention, from those who are engaged in manual occupations, than its importance entitles it to claim. I refer to History, the digest of the experience of past ages; the voice of venerable antiquity; and I have thought, that I cannot better occupy the time allotted to the present exercise, than by an effort to awaken an interest in your minds, in this useful and attractive study.

I propose to touch on three several topics of remark, viz: the value of historical knowledge; the difficulties in the way of its attainment; and the method in which the study may most successfully be pursued.

I am first to speak of the value of historical knowledge; more especially of course, of its value to the active classes, and as a branch of general information.

The various studies which claim and occupy the attention of mankind, admit of an arrangement into two general classes. They may be distinguished as those, which to most by whom they are pursued, are valuable only or chiefly in the acquisition; and those which to all, are valuable in the possession. No small proportion of the studies which it is deemed important to pursue in the attainment of a finished education, are pursued by most, without any expectation of ever turning them to any practical account. They receive attention, mainly for the sake of their influence on the mind while studied. This is true in relation to the higher Mathematics, to the abstruse parts of Metaphysics, and other kindred subjects. While on the other hand, Natural History in its various branches, the Elementary Philosophy of the mind, Rhetoric, Logic and Belles Lettres, are pursued as well for what they are when mastered, as for any incidental advantage to be reaped in the pursuit. History as a study, be-

longs to the latter class; it has the recommendation of being eminently useful both in the acquisition and possession.

It cannot be properly pursued, without answering the end of a salutary mental discipline. The exercise which it demands, of some of the most important of the intellectual powers, makes it a matter of necessity, that it should help to develop and invigorate those powers. Reflect a moment, for example, on the effect it must have upon the memory. History in its appropriate form, is not, as it is sometimes imagined by those who have looked only at its surface, a disorderly catalogue of incidents, names, dates, and revolutions, with no principle of order and arrangement to connect them. It is, if what it should be, a systematic, well digested view, of manners, institutions, and events. The exercise which it affords the memory, therefore, is that which is best fitted, while it adds vigor to the faculty and renders it tenacious, to train it to orderly and philosophic habits. It teaches it to associate facts and principles, according to real, instead of fanciful relations.

Nor is it less suited to improve the judgment. It calls this faculty into constant exercise, in estimating the credibility of historic testimony, the causes and consequences of political and social changes, the comparative value of different governments and institutions, and the character of individuals and of nations. It must often be employed in comparing contradictory authorities; making allowance for the influence of individual or party prejudice; and educing truth from the doubtfulness of conflicting representations. For every distinguished individual, every reigning family, every measure of government, will have its friends and enemies, whose predilections will be but ill concealed, even under the sober garb of the historian. If you wish, for instance, to form a judgment of the character and acts of Oliver Cromwell, you will find one class of writers, who ascribe to him every virtue, that should enter into the character of the statesman and the hero; and you will find another class, equally unanimous, in representing him as distinguished only by ambition, hypocrisy, and coarseness. Here you are compelled to take into view the position of the parties, their biasses, their interests, and whatever

circumstances would be likely to influence their opinions. You must make deductions from all statements, set over one authority against another, and arrive at your conclusions by an approximating process,—an estimate of probabilities. But in pursuing such a course, you employ the judgment, in a way which is eminently fitted to improve it. You acquire that kind of judgment, that careful and deliberate discrimination, which is of the highest value in the practical concerns of life.

Equally favorable is the influence of this study on the reasoning powers. History may properly be regarded, as a collection of data, on which deductions may be founded. And it is, after all, the great principles and truths which are derived from reasoning on the facts of history, that constitute its pith and value. All else is but the letter; this is the essential spirit. It is of little consequence to us, to know that Augustus Cæsar occupied the throne, and that such and such were the occurrences of his reign; unless from these facts, we ascend to the maxims of policy which he adopted, and the measures of government which he pursued. And very many of the events which history records, require reasoning the most cautious and profound, in order to put us in possession of the practical lessons they are fitted to afford. Take the Reformation as an instance. To decide whether this great event, was the result of a sudden impulse, or of a long process of gradual preparation in the human mind; what causes were most efficient in bringing it to pass; what has been its influence on government, institutions, and religion; and other similar points, requires a no less vigorous exercise of the reasoning powers, than the demonstration of the most difficult problems in Geometry. The exercise is of a different kind indeed, but it has a value peculiarly its own. It forms the habit of reasoning, as well as judging, in view of various and conflicting facts; the habit therefore, which best qualifies for the various emergencies of every day's affairs.

But if, on these several accounts, a knowledge of History is valuable in acquisition, it has also an equal, if not a higher value, in possession.

The possession of it is intellectually of high importance. He

who has never extended his researches beyond the times in which he lives, is like one who has never travelled beyond the limits of his native valley. His views can have nothing of enlargement. His mind, so limited in its excursions, can have few materials for reflection, and few premises for reasoning. On a great variety of subjects, he must be shut up to his own narrow observations, and be denied the pleasure of communication with the great and good of other times; and the instruction, to be derived from tracing states in their origin and growth, and meditating over their decay and ruin. But the student of History, expands his views of man, of principles, of causes and effects, and gathers up the treasures of the past, to add to his own intellectual riches. He is like one who stands upon an eminence, and sees the mountains, the valleys, the streams, and the meadows, spread out in beautiful variety around him, to be surveyed in general prospect, or examined in particular views, as may afford the highest gratification. He possesses too, a key, which opens to his understanding the historical and mythic illustrations, with which the great masters of composition, both in prose and verse, have enriched their pages; and he is thus enabled, in higher measure, to appreciate and enjoy the works of taste and genius, which are the product of his own time, and written in his native language. He possesses in short an intellectual fund, which may be applied to a thousand useful purposes, and the want of which nothing could supply.

Nor is a knowledge of history less valuable in a political, than in an intellectual point of view. Indeed, I would urge with peculiar emphasis, its claims on your attention,—on the attention of the industrious and enterprising classes, whose influence is so prominent in political affairs—in consideration of the light it is fitted to afford, in the discharge of the duties of good citizens. How large a part of history, is occupied with the detail of different experiments of government, with the application and the results of different systems of political economy, and with facts which illustrate the tendencies of different institutions, on the well-being of society. It is in fact, the record of the embodied wisdom and experience of the generations that have gone

before us, in relation to these several subjects. It furnishes, therefore, the materials from which political sagacity may be derived; and as human nature in all ages is essentially the same, it affords the means of calculating the results of civil agitations, and of the prevailing tendencies of popular sentiment. This is a point well understood by eminent statesmen. They make history their text book. They find it a kind of political sun, that sheds light and certainty upon their way. And as it lends them wisdom to control the state, it will make the people also, wise to understand the real character of public measures, and the utility of the line of policy pursued by state and general governments. It will assist them to discriminate between real and imaginary public dangers. It will teach them that the commotions which are most noisy, are not always the most perilous: that the collision of contending parties, where there is freedom of opinion and discussion, may seem to shake every pillar of the political fabric, and yet pass harmlessly away; while corruption, ambition, and intrigue, sap the deep foundations silently, and bring the structure to an unexpected downfall. And these are lessons, which must be eminently useful to the citizens of a country governed like our own. The genius of our institutions, makes it necessary that every member of society, should have at least a general knowledge, of the dangers and safeguards of the state, that none may be either presumptuously secure or needlessly alarmed; and that each may be able to turn his influence as a freeman to the best account. A people well instructed in the history of the past, will be able to judge of public affairs, and to bear their part in them, with sober and enlightened views.

And it may be added, in a word, that the knowledge of history has also an important moral value. It illustrates in the clearest manner, the great truth that public virtue only, can secure the public welfare. And though the record of past ages, is to a great extent, a record of revolutions; though it shows us nation dashed against nation, institutions formed apparently only to be swept away, and victories achieved over ignorance and barbarism, only to be succeeded by defeat, and by the throwing back of civilization; yet on the whole, and taking centuries together,



it is manifest that the overruling Providence of God, has been educating order from confusion, and preparing the world by a gradual process, for a higher condition of civilization, refinement and religion, than has ever yet been seen. And such a view, is fitted to inspire confidence in the wisdom and goodness of the Almighty Ruler, and to excite the anticipation, that

—“Scenes surpassing fable, and yet true,”

will be witnessed in the progressive elevation and improvement of mankind.

I now pass on to the second topic, on which I proposed to touch; viz: The difficulties in the way of the attainment of a respectable knowledge of history, by those who are devoted to mechanical or other active occupations.

The most obvious and common difficulty, among the working classes, is the want of sufficient time for study. Those who are engaged in mechanical pursuits, are generally occupied throughout the day, and many also through a large portion of the evening. And when their labors are concluded, they feel much more disposed to seek

“Kind nature’s sweet restorer—balmy sleep,”

than to make any effort at intellectual improvement. And this is a difficulty of a formidable kind. It is not insurmountable indeed; but it requires in order to surmount it, an intellectual thirst that will not be denied, an energy and perseverance that cannot be discouraged. Such thirst, such perseverance, will create leisure in the pressure of business and of care. And after all, the active classes are probably more nearly on a level with professional men, than they are accustomed to suppose. The latter have urgent and time-consuming duties to perform, as truly as the former. “It is a great mistake,”—says Governor Everett of Massachusetts, in a speech at a late meeting of the friends of Education in Bristol County,—“it is a great mistake, to suppose that it is necessary to be a professional man, in order to have leisure to indulge a taste for reading. Far otherwise. I believe the mechanic, the engineer, the husbandman, the trader, have quite as much leisure as the average of men in the learned

professions. I know some men, busily engaged in their different callings of active life, whose minds are well stored with various useful knowledge, acquired from books." In support of the opinion thus expressed, the Governor read a letter from an individual engaged in the laborious occupation of a Blacksmith, who without relinquishing his calling, has attained for himself a rank among the first linguists of the country; having mastered the Latin, the Greek, the Hebrew and its kindred dialects, together with the most important languages of modern Europe to the number of fifty in the whole. There have been other similar examples. And there have been many who, like Franklin, have qualified themselves while apprentices and journeymen, to become philosophers and statesmen, by redeeming and dilligently improving time. Such instances may serve to show, how much may be done at personal improvement by resolute effort, though but little time comparatively can be commanded for the purpose.

A second difficulty, is found in the vast extent of history. I well remember with what a feeling of despair, on first turning my own attention to the subject, I cast my eye over the apparently boundless field. There seemed to be an infinite series of persons and events, a chaos of kings, queens and heroes, of battles, sieges and convulsions, to become acquainted with which, was a task, to say the least, exceedingly discouraging. There are doubtless some of you, who have felt the full force of this discouragement. When in an hour of leisure, you have glanced towards the subject, you have seen that thousands of years were to be passed over. You have percieved state rising behind state, and kingdom behind kingdom. You have encountered not only the great events, which have been connected with important consequences, but also an endless detail of time, place, and circumstances. And on proceeding to select your authors, you have found octavo added to octavo, and even folio to folio, in long and formidable array; till you have seemed to have before you the business of a life, instead of an occupation for the few hours, which you may be able to redeem. But this difficulty, is not so great as it appears. A little accomplished every day, will swell in a year to a very considerable amount. And you will soon

discover, too, that a large part of the detail of history, is no wise important to be remembered. The less important circumstances, are chiefly valuable as the connecting links of the more important, and may in general be passed lightly over. And the labor of reducing a multiplicity of events into one comprehensive view, may as I shall endeavor to show before I close, be materially diminished by a proper plan of study.

There are other difficulties, it remains to mention, which grow out of the very nature of the subject. If you wish to make yourself acquainted with Geometry, you can select a text-book, which presents the subject in the simplest and most favorable form; and commencing with the elements, you may advance with certainty through each successive step, until the work is done. But you cannot thus proceed in history. You have in this to deal in probabilities. When you suppose that you have made yourself acquainted with some particular period, on reference to a new authority, you meet with statements which present the whole in an entirely different light; and thus your previous opinions are unsettled, your deductions overthrown, and the whole ground to be surveyed anew.

Perplexities of such a nature it is not possible wholly to avoid; nor is this on the whole to be desired; since they afford that kind of mental exercise, which, as has already been remarked, is an important benefit resulting from the study. It will however, be easy to learn from those who are able to inform you, by what authorities it is safe for you to be guided. And as your own knowledge on the subject, is enlarged, you will become better and better able to detect the deficiencies of authors, and to discover where truth actually lies.

The third topic comes next to be considered. The question, How may history be studied to the best advantage, I need not say, is one of great importance. It is in fact, no other than the question—how all the difficulties of the subject may be most easily overcome, and the most rapid progress be secured. For the want of suitable instruction here, many who have made great effort to possess themselves of whatever is valuable in history, have bestowed their time and pains to little purpose. They have commenced their reading with the most voluminous authors, intending to read all the chief historians in order, under the

impression that they should thus obtain the greatest amount of accurate information. It is possible that this course may do for men of leisure. But there are insuperable objections, as it seems to me, to such a method of proceeding, in the case of those whose opportunities are limited, and who must necessarily read brief portions at a time. For besides that it is nearly or quite impossible, that they should ever in this manner, go over the whole ground of authentic history, they will be almost certain to become bewildered in the maze of dates, incidents, and names, and to fail entirely, of obtaining definite and well digested views. In most cases, they will be likely to give over the study in despair.

The plan which I shall take the liberty to recommend, will, I am persuaded, be found most useful in the great majority of cases. It will simplify the subject, and enable those who can read but little at a time, to advance intelligently and step by step.

I would say then first,—begin with the study of Historical Outlines. By Historical Outlines, I mean those digests of universal History which present in a small compass the most general features of the subject; which give, in the fewest words, the names, succession, and comparative importance, of the principal states and empires whose history has been preserved; describe the general progress of society; and mention only those individuals and events, which have had the greatest influence on the condition of mankind. Dr. Lardner's Outlines of Universal History, which is of a convenient size, and easily obtained, is an excellent work of this description. Worcester's Elements of history with charts, may also advantageously be used; these and some others which it is here unnecessary to name, offer to the mind a general skeleton, which when possessed, may gradually be filled and made complete.

With some work of this description for a guide, spread out the map of the world before you, and fix your eye upon the spot from which, as from a common centre, it appears both from profane and sacred history, that the human race originally spread. You will find, that learned men have reduced all the varieties of

the human species, to three original races; viz: the Caucasian, the Mongul, and the Ethiopian: and that these races spread, from the place of their common origin, the country south of the Caucasian range of mountains, taking the following general directions. The Caucasian spread north and west, or towards Europe; the Mongul east, or over Central and Eastern Asia; and the Ethiopian, south and west, or towards Africa; of course mingling with each other, to a greater or less extent, at the points where they come in contact. You will learn that the Caucasian race, has been by far the most distinguished for civilization and intellectual and moral elevation. You will notice the most ancient Empires, the Babylonian and Assyrian, the Persian somewhat later, Egypt under her successive dynasties, Phœnicia the reputed source of letters, and celebrated for commercial enterprise, Greece in the days of her renown, the Macedonian Empire, Rome in her rise and her decline, the Eastern and the Western Empires, Mohammed and the Kaliphs, the ascendancy of the Papal power, Charlemagne, the institutions of the middle ages; and that chaos of the social elements, out of which the order and beauty of Modern Civilization has arisen. Modern History, as it is more copious, would require a more particular survey. Having thoroughly digested such a general view, you will be able to refer every part which you may learn from time to time, directly to its proper place. It will afterwards be of comparatively little consequence, in what order you may read. Arrangement will be easy, as you descend from generals to particulars, and you will be able to proceed intelligently, and with satisfaction to yourselves, instead of groping your way in darkness and perplexity.

Having possessed yourselves of a clear general view of the course of historical events, proceed as a second step to Philosophical Histories. By this title, I would designate those, which together with an outline of the prominent events of the periods over which they pass, embrace a consideration of the causes and effects of those events; which enable the reader to trace through outward changes, the internal condition of society; the state and progress of education, manners, science and letters, liberty,

religion, in a word, the state and progress of the human mind. This class of historians, will give additional fulness to your general views, at the same time that they lead you to reflection, and assist you to apprehend the great practical instruction, which, is placed before you, in the experience of other times. There has been lately published a History of Civilization, by M. Guizot, French Minister of Public Instruction; to which, permit me to refer you, as a specimen of Philosophical History, popular and happy in its execution, and well adapted to instruct you in relation to the general advancement of society in Europe, since the decline of the Roman Empire. By the reading of such works, you catch the spirit of history. You come to feel, that however dry and tedious it may at first appear, it is richly instructive, and even highly interesting; and what is of the first importance you learn what parts of history deserve the most attentive study.

And this brings us to the third step, in the course which I am venturing to suggest; viz: the study of Historical Eras. The minute detail of the more copious historians, is not without its value. Those histories are the dictionary of the subject; and it is sometimes important, to consult their minutest statements, for the purpose of adjusting an essential fact or date, which is in controversy. After all, however, the great proportion of historical instruction, is connected with particular periods—periods which constituted crises, in the fate of governments or nations.

In the history of England for example, the reign of Henry VIII, was a religious era; the reign of Charles the I., and the period of the revolution, was a political era; and the reign of the good Queen Anne, was a literary era. The christian would not willingly be ignorant of the first, nor the statesman of the second, nor the scholar of the third. And so in the annals of almost every nation, certain eventful periods may be found, which deserve and should receive, particular investigation. They are the turning points in the tide of human affairs, about which vast results, for good or ill, are seen to cluster; you can afford therefore, to bestow on them something more than a passing notice.

And lastly, let me add, read Memoirs and the Lives of distinguished individuals;—of the prominent actors in the great drama

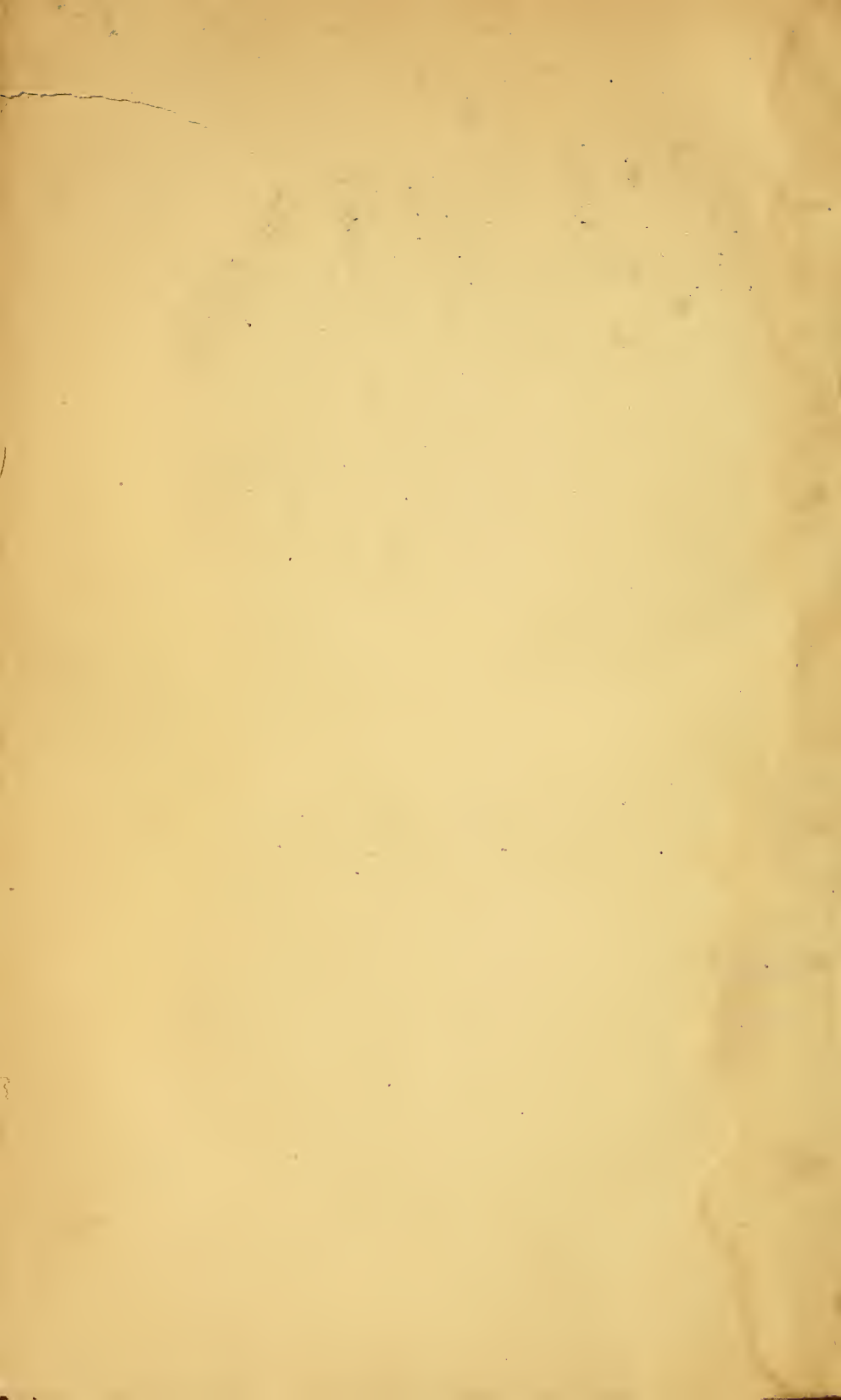
of this world's events. Memoirs, as you are probably aware,—intending by the term the history of an individual, as connected with that of the times in which he lived,—are, as a class of writings, almost peculiar to the French. No inconsiderable part of the history of France, may be found in the Memoirs of such writers as Philip de Comines, the Duke of Sully, Cardinal de Retz, Rochefoucault, and of many later authors, presented in a style which gives it almost the attractiveness of fiction. The personal history and adventures of the writer, while it gives connection and unity to the work, answers also the two-fold purpose of imparting interest to the narrative, and of fixing in the memory by association those grand facts which are of chief importance. And Lives, as they are commonly written in our own language, are recommended by the same advantages, though they possess them generally in a less degree. The life of Alexander the Great, is the history of the creation of an Empire; that of Cæsar, of the overthrow of Roman liberty; that of Napoleon Bonaparte, of the fortunes of all Europe, for more than twenty years. And you will always find in reading works of this description that while the mind seems filled with the individual, it is in fact, filling up to great advantage its general views of the history of the world. The most lively and distinct impressions of manners and society, will in this way be obtained; because you follow the subject of your narration, into the scenes of private as well as public life; and witness the exhibitions of the parlor and the coterie, as well as those of the camp, the hall of legislation and the cabinet.

Such is a brief statement of the method, in which it is believed, you will find the Study of History most simple and inviting. I cannot promise indeed, that on this or any other plan, you will master the subject with little or no effort. To find and to appropriate sufficient time, to give you a tolerable acquaintance with this branch of knowledge, will doubtless demand of you some sacrifices, and much and resolute perseverance. But then, you may rest assured, that your pains will be richly recompensed. Success is certainly practicable. With all the claims which active labor makes upon your time and thoughts, and with the devotion of a part of your small amount of leisure to reading

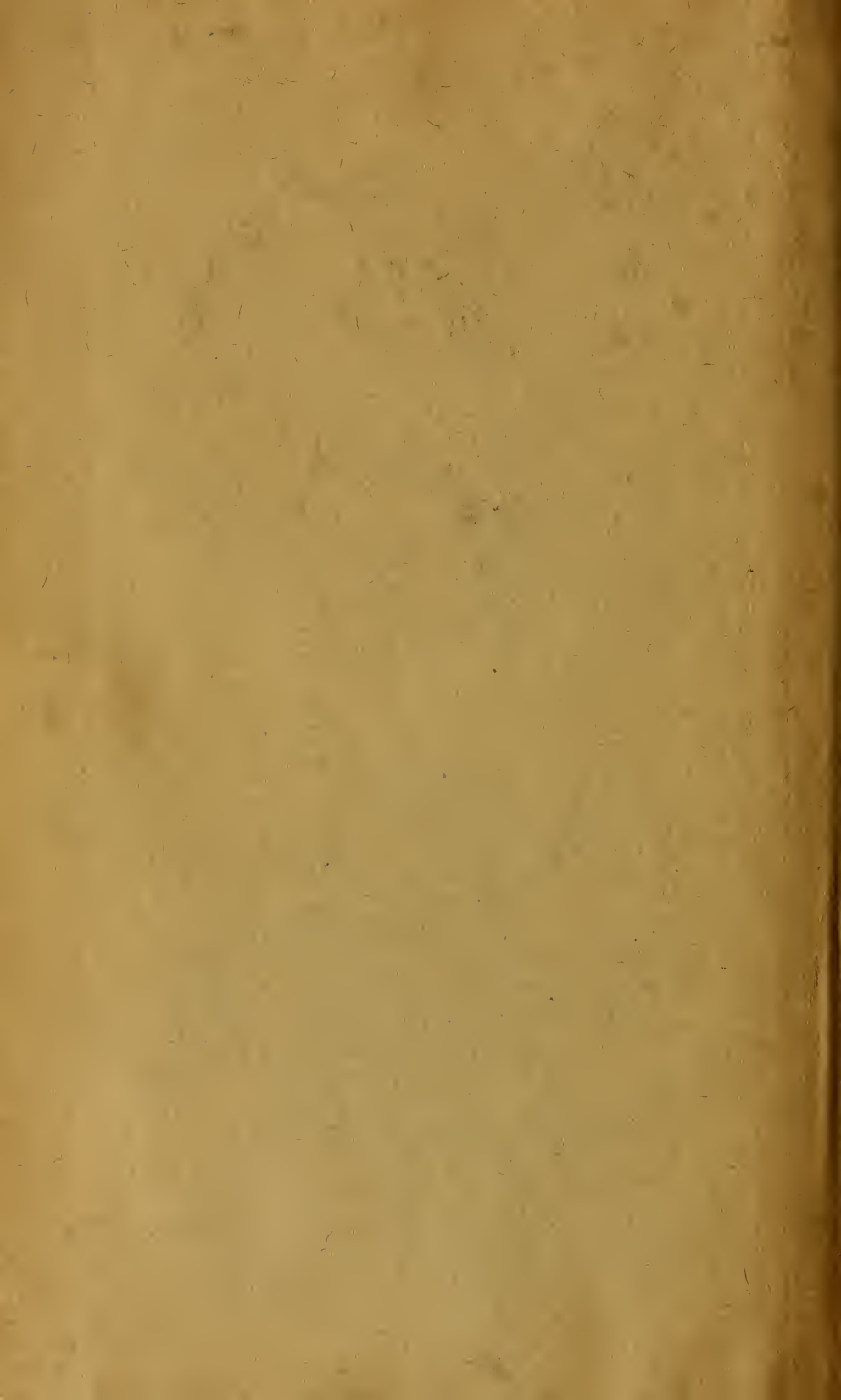
and study on other important subjects, you may yet, in a few years at most, obtain such an acquaintance with the facts and truths of history, as will prove to you an invaluable treasure. There is a rich pleasure in the possession of expanded views. There is more than pleasure, in being able to feel, as a citizen of a free community, that with minds enlightened by the knowledge of the past, we are qualified to consult for the well-being of our own government and institutions, for the time to come. I wish that I could inspire you with an enthusiasm which should not pass away with the present hour; that I could awaken in your minds a thirst, which should be quenched only by extensive acquisitions. It is only by enriching our minds, and acquiring liberal views, that we can fully discharge our duty to ourselves, to society at large, and to posterity. It is only thus, that we can use to the best effect, the talents God has given us, and render ourselves in any measure worthy, of the rich inheritance of intellectual and civil blessings, of which his kind Providence has put us in possession. I commit the subject to your thoughts.











BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY



3 9999 05532 204 2

JAN 24 1994

